



Ontario

Ministry of
Community and
Social Services

Can you babysit tonight?

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Editor's note: for simplicity, the term "he" is used in this booklet, but the material and information applies equally to boys and girls.

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Introduction

Babysitting is an important part of our way of life.

Thanks to babysitting, parents can enjoy an evening of recreation together, go shopping, etc.; teenage babysitters get a chance to earn pocket money without having their studies suffer; boys and girls, interested in working with children, get valuable experience.

When you were younger, you probably had someone babysit you. Now here you are ready to sit for someone else. Before you do, think it over carefully and discuss it with your parents.

As a babysitter you must have the maturity to deal with young children and with emergency situations. A babysitting course conducted by church and community groups such as the Red Cross, municipalities or fire departments will also help you in this new job.

The Ministry of Community and Social Services wants to see children happy and well cared for. That's where you come in. This is your book. It is full of important ideas, from safety facts to games you can play, all designed to help you to be a good babysitter.



You take on a big responsibility

When you babysit, a human life is put in your care. There is no greater trust that can be given. You are a great help to parents. When you babysit you're providing the parents with the opportunity to get important work done, keep an appointment or have a few hours of very necessary relaxation.

Parents must know that they can depend on you. Reassure them. Give reliable references and assurance of your good health. Be careful, patient and considerate. Remember that young children will learn some of their first lessons in life from you.

You also will be learning. This is probably your first job. Practise good habits. If you are regular and dependable from the start, you will find your babysitting days will help prepare you for full-time work.



Would you be a good babysitter?

Do you like children?

Ask yourself this most important question. If you like children you will probably be a good babysitter. Children recognize a friend. If you are happy in their company and find it easy to be patient with them, anything you need to know will be easily learned.

Are you dependable?

Babysitting is a way of earning a little money. But with it come obligations and duties. The children come first, and you must realize you cannot count on much time to yourself because they may need attention. Take homework with you if you like. You probably will have time to do it. But take something that does not have to be ready for the next day because the children might require more of your time than you expected.

Be reliable and thoughtful.

If through some emergency you cannot show up, let the parents know at once. Tell them if you have a cold or if there are any infectious diseases in your home (Chicken Pox, etc.). It's helpful to the parents if you can recommend a friend to take your place.

When you accept a job be sure you have the parents' name, address and phone number (home and office) so you can reach them ahead of time if necessary.

Be on time

Even a few minutes can spoil the parents' evening. It's better to be a little early. Then they will not have to rush through instructions and you may be able to help with last minute tasks.

Do you practise good manners?

Good manners include respecting the privacy of another person's home. Wait to be invited to use the radio or television and be sure you do not play them so loudly that you disturb the neighbours or cannot hear the children.

Find out where the children's rooms are, how the stove and furnace work and where the light switches are. Beyond this, show your respect by not looking into desk and bureau drawers.

Bring your own snack, unless you've been invited to help yourself.

Limit conversations on the telephone (10 - 15 minutes) in case the parents are trying to reach you with important instructions. If the phone rings, answer and write any messages down.

A friend?

You may ask the parents if you may bring a friend. Your own parents should know of the plan too. The best arrangement, though, is to go alone and busy yourself with homework, reading, etc., as time permits.

Personal neatness also is important.

Be sure you look neat and your manner is pleasant and alert. Leave things tidy. If you make the children dinner or a snack, tidy up the kitchen afterwards (unless you are too occupied with the children).



Getting ready

Find out about the children

Always find out in advance how many children there are in the family as well as their names, ages and interests. It's best to babysit at homes near your own and for people and children you know. If you have any questions about the care of children, discuss them with your mother or a close neighbour who has children.

When babysitting at a home for the first time, arrange to arrive early so that you and the children have some time to become acquainted before their parents leave.

Find out about their friends

When babysitting during the day it is especially important to ask the parents about the children's playmates or play arrangements. Unless it has been arranged between you and the parents, do not let little friends into the house to play — their parents may not know where they are, and you may not know who they are. Older children, who can be trusted to play out of doors, should be warned not to go into a neighbour's house without your permission.

Find out about pets

You'll want to know ahead of time about any dogs or cats, and what they're allowed to do. Get to know dogs while the parents are still there since many dogs feel protective towards the family children and may resent a stranger.

Find out important facts

Prepare a card ahead of time (see sample on page 8) and have the parents fill it in before they leave.

Remember that little children may test you, for example, by telling you, "I usually stay up until nine o'clock." Written instructions will help you meet this situation.

How to babysit

Keep them safe

Your first duty as a babysitter is to know where the children are and what they are doing.

Before the parents leave, check with them about security — are windows at a low level closed and locked? What other access is there to the house (backdoor, garage, etc.)? Be sure you know how to lock the door once parents have left. Keep the drapes drawn at night. Ask the parents if they normally leave their porch light on; if they don't, it's a good idea to keep it off so that the house looks the same as at other times.

Never leave a baby alone, unless he is in a crib, a playpen or fastened in a carriage. Even very young babies fall off beds or tables or tip over a high chair. If you cannot leave the baby safely or carry him with you, don't answer the telephone or door-bell. In any case, it is a good rule not to answer the door at night unless you know who is there.

Even after the children are asleep, keep awake yourself and make 'rounds' of the house every hour. Open the cellar door and sniff for smoke. Check the stove. Make sure the children are covered and breathing quietly and regularly. Leave their doors ajar so that you can hear them more readily if they should need you.

Dangers in the kitchen:

Most home accidents happen here. If you are preparing a meal or snack for a pre-school child, it is best to have him with you in the kitchen where you can see what he is doing. Be sure there are no poisonous cleaning agents within his reach. Pot handles on the stove should be turned to the back or centre of the stove so that the child cannot reach them.

Dangers in the bathroom:

Never touch an electric switch with wet hands, or use an electric heater or radio in the bathroom. Never leave a child alone in the bathtub where he may slip and fall or scald himself. Never let a child chew soap or leave it on the floor where it may cause a fall. See that a child cannot reach pills or medicines.

How to babysit

Danger in the living room:

Watch that a child does not pull electric cords and topple a lamp on top of himself. Be sure the child cannot put a metal object, such as a nail file, in an electric socket, since it would give him a nasty shock. Even if there's a fireplace it is best not to use it. Especially, be careful to keep matches and cigarette lighters away from children.

Toys themselves can provide dangers:

Do not let too many toys clutter the floor unless they are being played with. Of course, they should never be left on the stairs. Since babies often swallow toys, do not give them a toy smaller than their fists. Be sure there are no small parts such as loose buttons they could pull off and swallow.

Keep them healthy

The day-in and day-out care a child gets has much to do with his state of health. The parents know this and follow a certain routine of sleep and activity and a diet especially planned for each child. Carry this out as far as you are able.

If one of the children in your care suddenly becomes ill or has an accident (and it happens much more often with young children than with adolescents or adults), call the parents. If you cannot reach them immediately, call the doctor or the neighbour suggested by the parents. Never give a child medicine. If a child takes medicine regularly, it is better for the mother or father to give it before they go out.

Keep them busy

Knowing how to keep children happily occupied will prevent most discipline problems. A babysitter will find it helpful to have some simple games, stories and songs which will appeal to all ages of children. Babies enjoy any type of music, just being held and talked to or rocked.

Sample information card

Name of parents Mr. and Mrs. Taylor

Address 123 Maple Street

Phone: Home 123-4567 Office 891-0111

Where parents can be reached during absence The Theatre

Names and ages of children Billy 10

Susan 4, Sean 2

Bedtimes and usual routines Sean in bed at 7 p.m.

Read story to Susan at 7:30. Billy in bed at 8:30

Neighbours who may be called

Name Grossman's

Address 126 Maple St.

Phone 765-4321

Name Quan's

Address 98 Maple St.

Phone 098-7654

Relatives who may be called

Name Grandparents

Address 987 Main St.

Phone 456-7890

Name Aunt and Uncle

Address 456 East Ave.

Phone 321-1234

Important Telephone Numbers

Family Doctor 816-5432

Hospital 987-6543

Fire 234-5678

Taxi 345-6789

Police 456-7890

Other 567-8901

Babysitter's kit

Take a few interesting materials to the house in a shopping bag. Children are often more interested in something new or different than in their own toys.

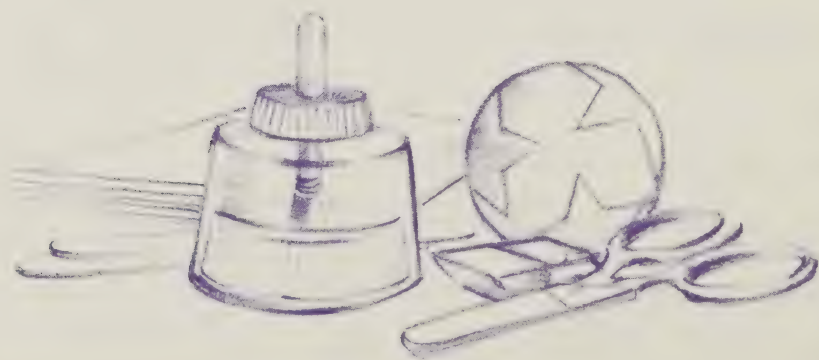
It would be well for you to have some things in mind to make with the materials, but if the child has his own ideas let him carry them out on his own initiative. If the child is interested and busy making something, let him do it his own way without correcting him. A child is easily discouraged and may not know how to copy your work. The child should not be given materials and games which are beyond his age level. You don't need to produce your materials and games if the child is busy and happy with his own toys.

Suggestions for the sitter's bag

Paper, pencils, crayons — for drawing and paper and pencil games. Coloured construction paper, used greeting cards, mail order catalogue — for paper cutting and gluing.

Paste and brushes, blunt scissors — to use with paper. Yarn, blunt needles, straws and circles of coloured paper — for necklace of cut straws and circles.

Simple riddles, guessing games — for children over five years. There are inexpensive books which give many suggestions of amusements, games and riddles for children.



You and the baby

Unless you are experienced with babies, do not undertake sitting for more than short periods at first. Discuss procedures with the parents and don't hesitate to ask questions. Find out:

How to pick up and hold him

When a baby is held loosely or awkwardly, he will become frightened. Held properly a baby feels that you love and understand him. Carry him firmly and securely but in such a manner that one of your hands is free.

How to change him

There are several good methods so discuss it with the parents. Find out whether you should use any creams or powder and if he should be double diapered for the night. You should also find out where the diapers and supplies (change of clothes, etc.) are kept.

Where his food is kept

Be sure you know where the drinking water, formula or other drinks are kept, whether or not they should be warmed and how. Ask if he takes it by spoon, bottle or cup. Does he have pablum or baby food as well?



You and the baby

When he is fed

Some babies are fed on demand while others are fed according to a schedule. The parents should be able to give you some guidelines as to what to expect.

How to give him a bottle

Hold him on your lap. See that there's always liquid in the nipple so that he isn't swallowing air. Tiny babies (under about three months) will stop for air and rest more often than older ones. Let him take back the bottle when he wants it.

A baby needs to be burped at least once during his meal as well as at the end. One method is to hold him on your shoulder (with a diaper or towel to protect your clothes) and pat or gently rub his back until he bubbles up any air. You might find out how the parents burp him as their methods will probably work best for you too. It is especially important to get the last bubble out at the end of his meal.

Don't expect him to finish the bottle every time as babies' appetites vary from feeding to feeding. The parents may be able to tell you how much he's likely to take.

How to give him solid foods

Young babies can be spoon fed while on your lap. Older ones, especially those who can sit up by themselves, may have a special infant seat. If he is to have pablum, you should know how thick to make it and about how much he might eat.

What position he likes to sleep in

Does he sleep better on his tummy, side or back? Find out how to raise or lower the side of the crib. When putting him to bed, be sure the side is firmly fixed in the up position. Don't give him a pillow. Check to be sure his bedding is dry, smooth and tight.

What to do when baby cries

When a baby cries he is telling you that he wants or needs something. It is his only way of 'talking' to you.

- 1 Check first to see if he needs changing or if pins are sticking in him. If he's crying shortly after a meal, he may still have an air bubble, so try burping him. Are his clothes and the bed smooth and comfortable? Feel the back of his neck to see if he is too hot or too cold. A little patting and tucking-in may settle him down.
- 2 The most common cause of crying is an empty stomach. If he cries a long time before the usual feeding hour, try giving him a few tablespoons of water. If it is near his feeding hour give him the feeding.
- 3 If he still does not settle, repeat the suggestions under item 1 about every twenty minutes. He may just be sensing that his mother is not there and want reassurance. Walk around with him a bit, talk or sing to him or rock him. He may want some companionship or attention.

If you can bring the crying to a stop, and make him calm and contented for a few minutes, chances are he will fall asleep.

Occasionally a baby cries the shrill, high-pitched scream which indicates acute pain. It is quite different from ordinary crying, and it is your signal to get in touch with the baby's parents or other responsible persons.

Games for babies

Babies like the human voice and rhythmic sounds. Play finger and toe games like *This little piggy went to market*, or hold his hands for *Pat-a-cake*. Try talking and singing to him.

You and the pre-school age child

What he is like

Sitting with infants can be easier but less interesting than with the toddler. Children from 18 months to 4 or 5 years are practically perpetual-motion machines. Any teenager who has the stamina and wit to make a good job of taking care of them is indeed a blessing to the parents. Children this age do not hide their feelings or thoughts, and your patient understanding is rewarded by their affection and by a glimpse into their minds.

How to get along with him

Be friendly in a quiet, relaxed way. Do not rush at the child with too much good will. Let him come to you. Listen more than you speak, and when you do speak to him, talk quietly and a little more slowly, bending down beside him. How would you like a giant shouting down at you all the time?

If the child becomes upset at the prospect of his parents leaving, don't try to argue him out of it. Just carry him to the window and try to get him to wave goodbye. It is surprising how many children will dry their tears before the parents are even out of sight. Now is the time to have some suggestions ready as to what the child could do.

Show him what is expected of him by setting a good example. Use positive suggestions. "Let's put the toys on the shelves," instead of "Don't leave your toys on the floor." Re-direct his interest to something that is all right. If he is splashing water, give him a boat. Offer him a choice of activities, such as, "Do you want to undress yourself or shall I help you?" That will often take his mind off the fact that he does not want to undress at all.

A calm attitude of expecting the child to co-operate with you and to follow his usual routine will work wonders. If you get flustered and threaten the child with what will happen when his parents get home, he is apt to treat it as a game and try to find out just what you are going to do about it.

Avoid romping so much with the children that they become wild with excitement. Of course, it is all right to have fun with them, and a lively game after supper will help use up their energy. But long before bedtime, you should get them calmed down by use of records, stories and quiet games.

Remember, they particularly love having stories told or read aloud to them. You will never have a more attentive audience.

Games for pre-schoolers

(two to four years old)

Peter and Paul

Two little birds sat upon a wall
(One index finger placed on each knee)
One named Peter, one named Paul.
(Raise each finger in turn)
Fly away Peter, fly away Paul.
(Waggle finger as you move arm behind back in arc)
Come back, Peter, come back, Paul.

Here's a Bunny

Here's a bunny
(Raise two fingers)
With ears so funny
And here's a hole in the ground
(Make a hole with the fingers of other hand)
At the first sound he hears
He pricks up his ears
(Straighten two fingers)
And pops right into the ground.
(Put into hole).

Tommy Thumb

Tommy Thumb
Tommy Thumb
Where are you?
Here I am, here I am
How do you do?
(Hands behind back — bring out thumbs and bend them up and down)
The Peter Point — Toby Tall — Ruby Ring — Baby Finger — Finger family — here we are

Bee Hives

Here are the bee hives
(Left hand cupped downward)
Where are the bees?
Hidden away where nobody sees.
(Hide fingers of right hand under left hand)
Soon they'll come creeping
Out of the hive
One, two, three, four, five.
(Fingers come out one by one)
Buzz-zz-zz
(Right hand circles round).

You and the school-age child

Babysitting with children of five or six years and over is quite different. They stay up later and may require more of your time. These children are capable of looking after themselves in many respects, yet they can be mischievous and might get carried away with excitement.

Traffic accidents are the greatest danger at this age, so be watchful if the children are playing outdoors. Do not let them play ball games where they are apt to run after a ball onto the street.

A good plan is to spend a certain amount of time playing some game with a child this age to show him that you are really interested in him and like him. Then you might suggest that he amuse himself while you start your homework.

Well in advance of bedtime, suggest that he get undressed and ready. Then read to him, either in the living room or in his bedroom, to get him settled down and ready for sleep. Let him know how many pages you will read, or show him on the clock when it will be bedtime. If he complains, be firm. And if necessary, tell him you have to get on with your homework. If you keep him happy he will respect you when you enforce the bedtime hour.

What about the child who is old enough to have homework himself? Sit down with him and work on your homework while he is doing his. He will appreciate a little encouragement and help. When he has finished, suggest a game or a television program before you send him off to bed.

What about the older child who won't obey? Young babysitters occasionally find that the school-age child may adopt the I-don't-have-to-do-what-you-say attitude. If the child was present when you discussed his program with his mother, he will be more likely to accept the fact that his parents have left you in charge. A mixture of good humour and firmness will usually control the child. Ignore any rude remarks children make to you. They are only trying to annoy you so do not let them succeed.

Never slap a child. The only time to use restraint is to prevent him from doing something dangerous, such as running out into the street or leaning out of the window. Remember your own childhood — there may have been occasions when you puzzled *your* parents or babysitters. However, such problems will be the exception in your babysitting experience.

Most children this age have a great admiration for teenagers, and if you have a program of activity to offer them and if you show that you know what you're doing, they will usually co-operate wholeheartedly with you.

Games for school-age children

(four to six years old)

Playing farm or circus

The following suggestions are for stunts for toddlers and older children. A theme could be used such as a farm or circus saying the following verse:

*I went to visit a farm one day
I saw a (cow) across the way
And this is what I heard it say
(Moo-Moo-Moo)*

As the verse is repeated different animals can be put in and suitable actions made up for each.

The Mule: The child puts hands on the floor, lowers his head, and supporting himself entirely on his hands, lashes out with his legs saying hee-haw.

The Rabbit: The child gets down on all fours and hops forward.

The Duck: The child squats down with hands on ankles and waddles around the room saying
*I think it the best of luck
That I was born a little duck,
With yellow socks and yellow shoes
That I may waddle where I choose.*

At the circus you could have:

Tight-rope walker: The child with arms outstretched at each side tries to walk on a straight line on the floor.

Bicycle: The child lies on the floor, hands above his head and pedals an imaginary bicycle with his feet. This verse could be repeated as this stunt is performed.

*I have a little tricycle,
I bought it at the shop,
And when I see the big red light
I know it's time to stop.*

*I have a little tricycle,
I ride it to and fro,
And when I see the big green light
I know it's time to go.*

You and the sick child

While you should not babysit for a child who is still very sick, you may help the parents by babysitting for half a day when the child is recuperating.

Such a child may still be in bed or allowed up for a short time. Ask the parents exactly what he is permitted to do. Remember that the child, after being in bed so long, may be eager for fun, but keep any games simple so you do not tire him. Suggest some of the following activities:

String buttons on a thread or spools on a shoe lace that has a firm metal end. Cutting and pasting is fun for older children. Catalogues, magazines and newspapers provide lots of pictures.

Make shadow pictures by placing a lamp so it shines on a wall, then the child can place his hands in such a way as to make a rabbit or a bird.

Cover a board with flannel, then cut out all kinds of shapes from felt and put them on the board to tell a story.

Colouring is always fun. Use crayons, water paints or coloured drawing pencils, depending on the age of the child.

Model all kinds of animals with plasticine in different colours.

Older children may enjoy games such as 'join the dots', X's and O's, and simple word games.



7 Rules to protect you

(From the Ontario Safety League)

- 1 Make sure you know who you're babysitting for. If the parents are unknown to you, ask for references and follow them up.
- 2 When you are satisfied the job is legitimate, give your parents the name, address and phone number of the people for whom you're working.
- 3 When you arrive at the child's home, call your parents to let them know you are safe and at what time you expect to be finished.
- 4 Make sure you have safe transportation home again.
- 5 Never let strangers into the house.
- 6 Never advertise your availability as a babysitter on bulletin boards. You could easily attract the wrong sort of person.
- 7 If the person for whom you are babysitting, makes any sexual advances towards you, or makes you feel uncomfortable in any way, tell him clearly you want him to stop. Advise your parents, or other trusted adult, as soon as possible. Remember, you have the right to say 'no', and you are not responsible for any unwanted sexual advances.

Finding out more about babysitting

Courses on babysitting are given in many communities by various groups such as the Red Cross, St. John Ambulance, the "Y", the local fire department or the recreation department of your municipality.

A film and teacher's guide have been produced by Playing With Time Inc. It is called, "Liz Sits the Schlegels", and may be borrowed by teachers for class showings. For more information contact McNabb Films, 49 Danville Drive, Willowdale, Ontario (416) 226-3060.

Public health units, community information centres and public libraries are also valuable resources.

Sample information card

Name of parents _____

Address _____

Phone: Home _____ Office _____

Where parents can be reached during absence _____

Names and ages of children _____

Bedtimes and usual routines _____

Sample information card

Neighbours who may be called

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Relatives who may be called

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Important Telephone Numbers

Family Doctor _____

Hospital _____

Fire _____

Taxi _____

Police _____

Other _____

Sample information card

Neighbours who may be called

Name _____

Name _____

Address _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Phone _____

Relatives who may be called

Name _____

Name _____

Address _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Phone _____

Important Telephone Numbers

Family Doctor _____

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Sample information card

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Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Relatives who may be called

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Important Telephone Numbers

Family Doctor _____

Hospital _____

Fire _____

Taxi _____

Police _____

Other _____



From the booklet
**Can you
babysit tonight?**

**Fire safety rules
for babysitters**

(from the Office of the Fire Marshall)

- 1 If you smell smoke, get the children out of the house immediately, then call the fire department.
- 2 In cold weather, do not delay to dress the children — it may be fatal. Wrap them in a blanket, or some other covering.
- 3 If there is an odour of gas, remove the children to safety. Call the fire department. Do not operate any switches as this may create a spark that could ignite the gas vapours and cause an explosion.
- 4 No matter how small the fire, move the children to a safe location outside the building and call the fire department.
- 5 Never re-enter a burning building for any reason. Smoke and gases from even a very small fire may be fatal.

John Sweeney
Minister



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